



Robert A. Heinlein

1907 - 1988

Heinlein is not a member of the Hall of Fame because of who he was, rather because of the effect his writings have had on who we are today. Winner of four Hugo Awards, Heinlein was known as the Father of Science Fiction, not the father of the cultural revolution; but, if not a father, at least he was an important midwife to the birth of many a revolutionary idea in the minds of millions of young men and women worldwide.

“Heinlein was always trying new things and pushing the envelope. He never was content with sitting still. He always had an agenda and was offering different ideas. Some of these ideas; group marriages, incest, open marriages, gene manipulation, homosexuality, politics, war, space travel, religion, etc. drew the ire of fundamentalists. Heinlein never shied away from things that needed to be considered in the modern world.” — The FAQ page on the Heinlein Society website.

Although his many books cover the gamut of social dynamics, it is in the areas of sex and religion that his impact on our culture was greatest. Personal responsibility for the consequences of one's actions was a consistent theme throughout his works, so he never was an advocate for “free” love. Yet his lovers often break free of the bounds imposed by political and religious attempts to repress and control us.

To the best of my knowledge, Heinlein never formulated The Most Insidious Lies in the way we present them; yet we remain confident of his enthusiastic endorsement should his spirit become aware of our current efforts.

To understand why Heinlein developed such a devoted following (there is even a Heinlein Society very much alive today) you should read his most influential writings (listed here in order of publication):

If This Goes On — (1940)

Stranger in a Strange Land (1961) [One of only two books¹ mentioned by Billy Joel in his historical-review song: *We Didn't Start the Fire*.]

The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress (1966)

I Will Fear No Evil (1970)

Friday (1983)

To fully appreciate Heinlein's mastery of fiction writing, try *Time Enough for Love* (1973), which is possibly the finest novel (of any kind) ever written. To best understand the setting, be sure to first read, *Methuselah's Children* (1958). This novella (along with *If This Goes On* —), can be found within the wonderful collection titled: *The Past Through Tomorrow*.

¹ The other book mentioned is *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger.

Quotes from Heinlein's Writings

The character quotes that we have selected seem to reflect the author's real views, although some inconsistencies have been noted.

Sex, Gender, and Relationships

Most moral philosophers consciously or unconsciously assume the essential correctness of our cultural sexual code — family, monogamy, continence, the postulate of privacy that troubled you so, restriction of intercourse to the marriage bed, etcetera. Having stipulated our cultural code as a whole, they fiddle with details — even such piffle as solemnly discussing whether or not the female breast is an "obscene" sight! But mostly they debate *how* the human animal can be induced or forced to obey this code, blandly ignoring the high probability that the heartaches and tragedies they see all around them originate in the code itself rather than the failure to abide by the code. [3]

Love is that condition in which the happiness of another person is essential to your own. [3]

The more you love, the more you *can* love — and the more intensely you can love. Nor is there any limit on how *many* you can love.² [2]

It is impossible for a man to love his wife wholeheartedly without loving all women somewhat. I suppose that the converse must be true of women. [2]

Sex should be friendly. Otherwise, stick to mechanical toys; it's more sanitary. [2]

Masturbation is cheap, clean, convenient, and free of any possibility of wrongdoing — and you don't have to go home in the cold. But it's *lonely*. [2]

Copulation is spiritual in essence — or it is merely friendly exercise. On second thought, strike out "merely." Copulation is not "merely" — even when it is just a happy pastime for two strangers. [2]

Nursing does not diminish the beauty of a woman's breasts; it enhances their charm by making them look lived in and happy. [2]

Whenever women have insisted on absolute equality with men, they have invariably wound up with the dirty end of the stick. What they are and what they can do makes them superior to men, and their proper tactic is to demand special privileges, all the traffic will bear. They should never settle merely for equality. [2]

A whore should be judged by the same criteria as other professionals offering services for pay — such as dentists, lawyers, hairdressers, physicians, plumbers, etc. Is she professionally competent? Does she give good measure? Is she honest with her clients?

It is possible that the percentage of honest and competent whores is higher than that of plumbers and much higher than that of lawyers. And enormously higher than that of professors. [2]

² Of course, there is a limit on the amount of time you have to express that love. [Ed.]

God and Religion

We're not trying to bring people to God; that's a contradiction in terms, you can't even say it in Martian. We're not trying to save souls, because souls can't be lost. We're not trying to get people to have faith, because what we offer is not faith but truth — truth they can check; we don't urge them to believe it. Truth for practical purposes, for here-and-now, truth as matter of fact as an ironing board and as useful as a loaf of bread. [3]

Of all the strange “crimes” that human beings have legislated out of nothing, “blasphemy” is the most amazing — with “obscenity” and “indecent exposure” fighting it out for second and third place. [2]

The most preposterous notion that H. sapiens has ever dreamed up is that the Lord God of Creation, Shaper and Ruler of all the Universes, wants the saccharine adoration of His creatures, can be swayed by their prayers, and becomes petulant if He does not receive this flattery. Yet this absurd fantasy, without a shred of evidence to bolster it, pays all the expenses of the oldest, largest, and least productive industry in all history. [2]

“God split himself into myriad parts that he might have friends.” This may not be true, but it sounds good — and is no sillier than any other theology. [2]

Sin lies only in hurting other people unnecessarily. All other “sins” are invented nonsense. (Hurting yourself is not sinful — just stupid.) [2]

Miscellaneous

You can sway a thousand men by appealing to their prejudices quicker than you can convince one man by logic. ... People believe what they want to believe and logic has no bearing on it. [4]

A desire not to butt into other people's business is at least eighty percent of all human 'wisdom' ... and the other twenty percent isn't very important. [3]

Remind me to write a popular article on the compulsive reading of news. The theme will be that most neuroses and some psychoses can be traced to the unnecessary and unhealthy habit of daily wallowing in the troubles and sins of five billion strangers. [3]

Secrecy is the keystone of all tyranny. ... When any government, or any church for that matter, undertakes to say to its subjects, “This you may not read, this you must not see, this you are forbidden to know,” the end result is tyranny and oppression, no matter how holy the motives. [4]

Live each golden moment as if it were eternity — without fear, without hope, but with a sybaritic gusto. [3]

Here are a few quotes from Heinlein's private letters re his personal life that seem congruent with the ideals of Spirits at Play:

"I haven't the slightest emotional or intellectual prejudice against homo play ... and if I do find myself sexually attracted to a man, and he to me, I won't try to resist the impulse; I'll simply try not to get caught."

"[Gay Lib and Fem Lib] are doing valiant fighting for personal freedom."

"Over the past fifty years I have run across enough of them to hazard a rough guess that over 10% of the married couples in this country are actively ambisexual at least occasionally — when the opportunity turns up, the circumstances are safe, the attraction is mutual all around, and each trusts all the others. Nor are the stated necessary conditions uncommon, as two married couples offer each other perfect chaperonage against the world behind locked doors, a condition that obtains any of the millions of times that one couple entertains another, even just for dinner and bridge or such.

"If the mutual interest and trust already exist, the situation can progress in as little as five minutes from a guarded and impersonal hint (one that could be ignored but this time is not) to open talk and then a relaxed and gentle but all-out orgy. Or it might take five weeks instead of five minutes and several progressive stages. But if both couples have 'been there before' although not with this couple, five minutes is more likely than five weeks. ... I think that '10%' figure is low; I would bet even money on 25% — although I don't know how such a bet could be settled — and would not be surprised at a higher figure. All through this century I have watched this culture move steadily from strict Victorianism into something much more open, and the end is not yet in sight."

Was Heinlein a swinger? Feels like so to me, but we'll probably never know. I do know that I would gladly give up a year of swinging memories in exchange for one quiet weekend in conversation with this incredible man.

Reviewers' Comments

Anyone reading this is certainly aware that there are hundreds of reviews of Heinlein's books now available online. The following are just meant to be a few teasers:

Stranger was "unlike anything Heinlein had [done] before, an amazingly iconoclastic and complex satire of sex and religion, with clever name games and private jokes embedded in the story." [1]

"A brilliant mind-bender...Wonderfully humanizing...The name of the leading character in *Stranger in a Strange Land* is as familiar to millions of literate persons as Oliver Twist or Holden Caulfield." —Kurt Vonnegut, *The New York Times Book Review*

Stranger is "certainly among the most influential...science fiction novel[s] of all time." —*The Guardian*

Stranger “was destined to become a bestseller, shaping the sensibilities of a generation.” — *Boston Globe*

re *Stranger*: “The story still portrays government, religion and culture accurately and the hero’s attempts to live for pleasure and happiness using logical values and morals still seem to be a valid lifestyle.” — *Amazon reviewer, 2018*

[1] Bill Patterson, Heinlein biographer.

[2] *Time Enough for Love*.

[3] *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

[4] *If This Goes On*—



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